

**The Ministry to the Magicians at Ephesus  
Acts 19:11-20**

Our text this morning we'll be looking at is Acts chapter 19. So, I encourage you to grab your Bibles and turn there to Acts chapter 19. We'll be looking at verses 11-20. What I think I'll do is we'll just read this, and then I'll orient you about where we are in the Scriptures. So, Acts 19:11 says, "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, 'I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?' And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."

This story, this episode, is occurring during the third missionary journey of Paul, and that missionary journey, which covers verses 18-23 all the way to chapter 21:16, will be focused on the city of Ephesus. Ephesus is a large city at the time, about at least 200,000 is the estimate. Not much there today, but back then, it was a thriving metropolis. In that city, it's on the western edge of what's now modern-day Turkey, the northern part of the Mediterranean, Paul started from Antioch on the far eastern side, had moved all across this land mass to the far western side by the Aegean Sea. That's where we are, in the town of Ephesus.

Now, different areas are kind of known for different things, like in America, we have the capital of the government in Washington D.C. We have the capital of business in Wall St. in New York city. Of course, the sin capital of the world... right? ...is Las Vegas. The country music capital is Nashville,

and, of course, the hot-air balloon capital is Albuquerque, New Mexico (had to throw that in there for you). Back in Acts 17, we looked at Athens and the philosophers of Athens and how Athens was the cultural capital of the Roman Empire. And we saw in Acts 18, we were in Corinth and that was the, sort of, capital of immorality of the Roman Empire. Well, Ephesus is the spiritual capital of the Roman Empire. Well, that kind of gives you an idea of why these sort of things are happening in Ephesus. They had a lot of stuff that was related to religion and spirituality. In fact, the largest building in the Roman Empire was the temple of Artemis, doesn't really exist today but the ruins. But there was a lot of value in this city being given to the religion of the gods, and when we read the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we can even see some of that. We can see places like Ephesians 1 and 3:10 and 6:12. There's instances of this struggle between the spiritual realm and not just "...against flesh and blood..." but the challenge of the hearts and the minds of the Ephesian people toward God rather than to the spiritual realm and the demons. So, we see that in the writings of Paul to the Ephesians. We see that in the history of Ephesus, and we see that now in this instance of this story of these exorcists with the demon, and all of this sort of stuff.

So, let's look into this a little more deeply, and we got to start off with the very miracles that were happening, and these miracles were described by a unique phrase called "...extraordinary miracles..." Now, I don't know about you, but when I think miracles, I don't think common. I don't think run-of-the-mill. There's not the "...extraordinary miracles..." then, the run-of-the-mill miracles. Miracles, sort of by definition, are extraordinary. Right? They're unusual. They are something that God is doing supernaturally; that is not expected, not part of the natural world order that we know. So, why are they called "...extraordinary..." here? Well, there's a reason these miracles are extraordinary, and they're described for us. In verse 11; "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out." So that's what made them extraordinary. They weren't extraordinary just because it was supernatural; that's a miracle. They were extraordinary because these very kinds of miracles were unique here to this place. And the clothes and the handkerchiefs, these are, like, sweat cloths, these materials, like, if Paul was a tent-maker, he was pretty clearly still engaged in some form of work and had materials with him to dry the sweat; that's the handkerchiefs, not to blow your nose. There was no air-conditioning back then, so you needed

something like that, or aprons, like even we might wear today if we were in a shop doing some manufacturing of some sort. That's what was being carried off, and God was using that to heal sick people. We see the only other, kind of, thing like this is the person that touched Jesus' garment as He was walking by (in Luke 8:44, same author), and He kind of noticed that power had gone out. There's a similarity to that, but other than that, this is a, really, truly "...extraordinary..." meaning unusually different in the types of miracles, of which there were many, that Paul was doing.

This day and age, people would like these sort of things to be not so extraordinary but to even be, kind of, common place. So, we have people - here's Benny Hinn. He's not the only one that does these sorts of things, but he has made quite a living off of this, praying over thousands of these cloths that he can send out to people so they can be healed or have some spiritual situation benefited because he's prayed over some cloth. These sorts of things, they're not that uncommon... that people do these sort of things. What is sad, though, is it's a sham. This is not really happening. This is just people lifting these stories out of this and believing that this is happening today. This sort of thing takes what is truly unusual and miraculous, which we find here, and brings the unusual, the extraordinary, down to something that's, like, usual or commonplace. Modern imitations of these historical events only serve to minimize their significance as validating the revelation of God.

What is really happening in these miracles of the New Testament is that God is using this to give evidence that these people that He is communicating with are truly His representatives, His messengers of His truth, and we find that in 2 Corinthians 2:12 and in Hebrews 2:3-4; that there's validating miracles, there's validating evidence that goes along with people that are speaking from Him. So, when you take these miraculous events and make them something that's just commonplace, I think it diminishes the significance of what's really happening there. Benny Hinn and the charismatic people that want to use articles or objects to try to bring healing are not... they're not the only ones that take this and kind of go with it, try to take the experiences of the book of Acts and make that happening today. We have that even in the Roman Catholic church. The Roman Catholic church uses chapter 19:12 as support of the use of relics. And if you're not familiar with relics, what a relic is, according to this teaching of Catholicism - any body part of a saint, any object used by a saint, or any object that came in

contact with any body part of a saint, is to be venerated and also aids in obtaining benefits from God. This is a technical definition. There's classes of relics. So, the first-class relic is a body part, and these are even classified like bones or hair or things like that. So, the body part's a first-class relic. An object used by a saint (you know, these are these people that Catholicism classifies as special holy people, not the New Testament classification of saint which is any believer), but any object that came in contact with a body part is now a third-class relic. So, these are the three classes that you have of this.

And to show you I'm not making that up, I just went last week and looked on eBay. You can buy them. Here's the hair of, supposedly, Mary the mother of Jesus, and it's for sale. Now to be fair here, Catholicism doesn't, in the Catholic law let you sell these. You can buy them because... the reason you can buy them is to sort of rescue them from the market place if you will. They're, most of them, are found in churches, basilicas, that sort of thing. So, how do people sell them? Well, they get around this by the box that the relic comes in, whether it's a bone supposedly of a saint or the true cross. Like, there's so many of these that... John Calvin it was... he quipped, back almost five hundred years ago, that "...if all the pieces [of the true cross] that could be found were collected together, they would make a big ship-load." That's what he said.

But, you know, obviously, there's a lot of suspicion about all this, and you kind of think, well, this is just, you know, bizarre; like, who's going to venerate and believe this? Well, you might think that I'm kind of taking and I'm cherry-picking some extreme view among Catholicism. Just so, you'll understand that this is actually mainstream teaching, this is from the Council of Trent in 1563; they wrote, "...they who affirm that veneration and honor are not due to the relics of saints; or, that these, and other sacred monuments, are uselessly honored by the faithful; and that the places dedicated to the memories of the saints are in vain visited with the view that obtaining their aid; are wholly condemned..." ...in other words, people like me who would say this is useless. In fact, I would say this is worse than useless. This is actually confusing the true worship of God. They say that I should be "...wholly condemned..." So, kind of a little difference of opinion here going on. So, there is... in the official teaching, this is a big deal, these kinds of stuff. And they get this as a proof text here in Acts chapter 19 where these "...handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick..."

I would just note this is described for you as “...extraordinary...,” like, not normal in the realm of miracles. So, by thinking of it in this way is kind of against even how it’s described here. Beyond that, pretending that something is going to happen, that is superstitious, truly, only confuses people and gets people believing something that... this is not how God functions in this day and age.

Okay. what else have we got? Well, this commonplace, this superstitious belief of the first century, really, this was commonplace among the people of Ephesus. So, Paul did not, in this account, initiate this activity. He didn’t hand out his aprons or his handkerchiefs and say use this. They were just doing this. So, what was happening? God was sovereignly working in a special way to accommodate their understanding, for the purpose of validating Paul as His messenger to them on behalf of God. So, this wasn’t Paul’s idea that this should happen. This was these people grabbing his stuff, and yet God worked extraordinarily in the midst of that to help this very spiritually minded people to listen to Paul and pay attention to him.

There were some other things that were going on during this time, and we had some Jewish exorcists that were going from place to place. They were like itinerant Jewish people that were trying to mimic the casting out of demons that Paul was able to do, and there’s this account of the people that were doing this. They, the “Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest...” ...we don’t know, really know, anything about him historically, but one thing we gain out of this is there’s a bunch of these people, seven at least, and so this account of this overcoming them by the evil spirit is noteworthy. These magicians, they had actually no ability to do the miracles of Paul they were attempting, so the only thing they were left with is copying his methods in the way we see people today who think that if we can just copy methodology then God will work through methods, and, truthfully, God is not, like, limited to work through the methods that we have. In fact, He’s not dependent on our methods. And whatever ways that we create things, that we think, well, this is going to work great because we’ve got the methods dialed in. God’s, of course, way bigger than that. But they thought by saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches...” that that was just going to work, and it sort of backfired.

In fact, they get sort of mocked. “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” They’re mocked here. They believed that using the right words would get a result according to their desires. And people today can believe that if you just use the right words, then you can achieve an end. In fact, there’s a plethora of books that will give you prayers to pray, things to do, to get what you want from God, like, He’s Santa Claus or something like that. So, this is not even a weird thinking. Today, people think that if I pray the official prayer, then God will hear that, and God will be happy with that. Well, God doesn’t need your crafting phrasing. Your phrases are powerless. It is the heart of us who communicates to God. In Romans 8:26, it says, “...we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...” You know, so we think we’re so smart. We don’t know. The people that are the professional, religious, prayer writers, they don’t know. There’s no secret key that unlocks the power of God to work in any of this. It’s the sovereignty of God. As we pray His will be done, and He works through that according to His desires, not our desires. So, what we’re looking to do in prayer is to just align ourselves with the desires of the Lord and if it’s “Your will be done...”

These exorcists were putting on a show, and they had no idea what they were doing, and it backfired on them, and it ended up making them wounded and naked, since they were overpowered. People who think they know more about the spiritual than what the Bible teaches are subjecting themselves and others to spiritual difficulties. There’s lots of people who make lots of claims about what the spiritual realm, what the demons are doing and all this stuff, and they don’t know what they’re talking about. Where we know about this is what God has told us in the Scripture, and the rest of this is a bunch of conjecture, and if you’re going to listen to all this conjecture, I would say you’re on sand; you’re not on solid ground. So, where we get the teaching of the spiritual realm is from the Scripture, and how we respond to the spiritual realm is how the Scripture instructs us. In the New Testament, we have the teaching of the epistles, that we aren’t running around trying to cast out demons. We’re just looking to “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

If we follow the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings, we will be protected because as a believer in Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and “...because greater is He who is in [us] than he who is in the world.” And there you have it. It’s that simple. But people want to make it, oh, so complicated, and you know what’s worse? ...to have an evil spirit

overpower you and you're wounded or to have teaching that is confused about evil spirits mess up your thinking? If you're wounded, guess what? You get over it. You get better and life goes on. When you're confused in the teaching about God and about the spiritual realm, and people are not teaching what the Bible says, and they're teaching all this other stuff about what people say and what supposedly is happening, what happens? People run into difficulties because they get distracted from the truth of Jesus into all this demon chasing, and it doesn't serve them, and it just doesn't go away. They just don't get healed by that because the body heals it. They struggle because they're confused.

So, look on to the aftermath of this account of these people that were beaten and wounded. What happens to the town of Ephesus? Verse 17 - we get the story of the faithful people, these other people that respond. Verse 17; "This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus..." Kind of a big deal and people knew about this, and it was quite the rage; "...and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified." So, getting things in order here, this event becomes known to all. And what happens, as people know about this, is they become fearful, like, oh, my! Now, this is not uncommon. When people kind of have a wow moment, and they go, hmm, and they might think, okay, they know of something, and think maybe I've been wrong, but that doesn't necessarily produce the magnifying the Lord Jesus. This magnifying the Lord Jesus, this lifting up of Jesus, and what that is, is happening through the believers, so that "...the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices." So, this repentance on the part of many was what moved the name of Jesus to be magnified.

Not everybody who encountered this episode and responded with fear closed the loop with repentance. So, what we need to do when we have an aha moment... oh, now I need to pay attention. Maybe I'm wrong. We need to repent. We don't need to go, maybe I'm wrong; hmm, oh well, and go on the same way we always have. That's God getting your attention, and you need to be responding to Him. That's what happened to many people, and God turned an incident, this story of these exorcists (these exorcists were... they were not worshipping God), He turned this incident, where no one was seeking to serve Him, into something that exalted Christ. So, this approach that was being used by God for the good, even though what they were trying

to do had absolutely nothing to do with God's will. It was against the will of God, but God used it for good, and God does that, obviously. And we can be confident that God is able to use all sorts of evil for a greater good. So, when you see hucksters shilling their wares in some religious fashion, you could know that God is able to use that sort of thing.

You know, I know that so far this morning... What are we, twenty minutes along here, twenty-five minutes along? And I've thrown Benny Hinn under the bus. Right? I've attacked Roman Catholicism. You know, why am I right and they're wrong? Let me ask you that. And I would say, it's not I'm right. This is not I'm right, they're wrong. It is about what the Bible teaches. So, you have a responsibility to know for yourself what the truth is. So, my encouragement to you is don't listen to me, necessarily. Listen to what the Bible teaches, and study it for yourself and see if this isn't an extraordinary miracle and if the purposes of all these things isn't for the validation of the revelation. And if the revelation isn't speaking to you, God's speaking to you so that you can know Him and be changed. If you are not receiving the Lord in that way, you may just be doing the religious thing and not having an actual relationship with Jesus Christ through faith.

With these people in Acts chapter 19, when they encounter this, they respond. And it requires some looking at this to really capture this because we can get confused about how people repent here. Okay? Verse 18 says, "Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices." So, that tells us something. What does that tell us? That tells us that there's people that were believers, that were followers of Christ, and they still needed to "...[confess] and [disclose] their practices." So, we kind of scratch our head a little bit here and go, hmm, how in the world can these believers be this confused? They are what? They're practicing magic, and they're believers in Christ? Well, the believers had not immediately forsaken their attachment to the books of magic upon their conversion. They still had all this stuff. So, what does that tell us? Well, that tells us that when they believed, they didn't immediately repent of all this. Our message to people about Jesus Christ isn't come to Jesus, and get rid of all this, and stop doing that, and turn away from this other thing; here's the list of things you need to stop doing. That's not our message. That's not what we're doing.

What we're doing is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." And that "...and you'll be saved..." part, ultimately, occurs in glory when we are fully delivered from sin, but in the meantime, we are being saved. We are being delivered from all kind of ungodliness, and undoubtedly, we are not all delivered from all the ungodliness because we haven't figured this all out yet. And the Ephesians had become followers of Jesus, many of them, and had not understood how this relates to their magic practices and all the books they had when this incident occurred. God used it to wake them up and to give them a clue that this is ungodly. And what they responded in verse 18, "Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing..." They agreed with God, and they said this is wrong. This is a dead end, "...and [they disclosed] their practices." So, people repent and believe in Christ without recognizing some of the ways that they had been practicing ungodliness. And that's probably true of you, where you have repented about a lot of things, but there's some things you haven't figured out yet, and this is where you need to continue to become more holy, more align your will with God's will, and understand better and respond. That's what was going on here.

And in verse 19; "And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." Since one piece of silver was, kind of, roughly the equivalent of a day's wage, this amounts to millions of dollars of economic value of our day's wages. So, if you wanted to, like, get all your cell phones (because I know how much you love your cell phones) and get all your electronics, (we'd have to get the whole church getting all their electronic devices, their laptops and all that), you know, to even equate to this kind of economic value. So, you wonder, how did they have all this stuff? Well, number one, there was a lot of people; there was many. Number two, their books weren't like your books. Your books come off a printing press. Their books had to be hand written because the printing press didn't get invented until almost fifteen hundred years after this; so, somebody had to hand write all this. Then, there was great value in all this in Ephesus; the community valued all this stuff. So, there was a lot of money. So, many of the believers confessed, repented, and they contributed to this big bonfire.

To understand this - this is not a selling of the books. They could have sold them and got just more money for all this. But they didn't do this, and the

reason they didn't do this is because the church had no interest in continuing the propagation of this superstition. So, we're not helping anybody by continuing the furtherance of anything that's leading people astray from the Lord. So, they were better off burning this stuff than selling this stuff, even if they could've gotten a lot of money for it. The church doesn't need the money. The church needed the truth, so they let the money go because they could not assist with any confusion. We cannot assist anyone with a confusion about Christ. So, as they gathered all this stuff and burned it, it was a natural, spontaneous response of the repentance of believers. This was not orchestrated. There was no performances here, didn't have any special music to go along with it, didn't set up bleachers. This was the natural, spontaneous response of the believers.

This is not an organized protest against the practices of the society. They're not saying, you society, you community, you really messed up. You've got these books; they're no good. They weren't doing that. They were just confessing their own practices, and they were doing this spontaneously. We in the Christian realm, we can get pretty good at our protests. In my lifetime, let's see, we've protested the Beatles. We've protested disco. We've protested rock 'n roll music. We've protested Harry Potter. We gotten stuff together and we've burned stuff. This is not what we're seeing here. What we're seeing here is a natural outflow of people that had their aha moment and said this is ungodliness. This is a dead end. This is a rat hole. Away with this stuff! That's what was going on. Planned demonstrations of repentance, you know what that is? That is only man's attempt to create the work of God. True repentance, the spontaneity of true repentance and people putting away their evil deeds; that cannot be manufactured by religion; that comes from the heart of man in the response to the word of God. So, that's what was going on here. So, understand that.

What is the final outcome of this repentance? The final outcome of this repentance is in verse 20, and that is the furtherance of ministry. Verse 20; "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." And if you're keeping score at home, this is the sixth of the seven progress reports in the book of Acts. There's these statements of the growth of the church throughout the book of Acts, and this is the sixth one of them. The last one will be at the very end of the book. So, we get one here, but we get one here described for us with certain words. The growth of God's word here is described as "...mightily..." and that is in contrast to the powerlessness of

the magic of the Ephesians, the practices of the Ephesians. The Ephesians thought they had power in these magical books, in these words. They were powerless. They didn't do anything. Real power, real might, is in the word of God and the knowledge of the word of God and the spread of the word of God is described as "...mightily and prevailing." as contrast to this other stuff. So, this repentance had a result, and the result of the repentance, of truly repentant people, was the spread of the word of God.

It wasn't only creating a bonfire and turning away from evil practices. Repentance doesn't stop there. Repentance continues with the spread of the word of the Lord. So, you may consider yourself repentant, and I would say let's look at the spread of the Lord through you. Is what's happening with you more than just the seeing evil deeds and turning away from this? But it is a communicating about Jesus Christ because as we are realizing that we are delivered from sin, it can't stop there. It has to be communicated, this wonderful news, that we can be delivered and that continues happening throughout our life; as we see more ungodliness and we are delivered from more evil practices, we share that. We confess that, and the word of the Lord prevails mightily. You have your people, your realm, that you spread the word of the Lord with. That's not the same people that I have. You do it in your way. I do it in my way. Everybody's got their unique sphere of relationships and their unique manner in how they do this, and I can't do this for you, and you can't do this for me.

And God wants you to be a repentant person. Participating in the spread of the word of the Lord is a response to the repentance that you have embraced. I hope that's you. I hope that's our church because we need that. This ought to be seen in our church of repentant people. Repentant people want to share about the truth of the Lord because they have experienced deliverance, and they want to see other people experience the same deliverance. That's what happened with these people in Ephesus. That's what ought to happen with us today. So, let's encourage one another toward that end. May our repentance from all ungodliness move us to spread the word of the Lord - that's the fruit of repentance in its full sense.